

## **The Blessings of Missionary Failures: A Portrait of Indigenous Peoples' Experiences of Education Delivery in Northern Luzon**

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### ABSTRACT

Faith-based educational institutions have been instrumental in raising the literacy levels of Filipinos in rural areas of the country in the aftermath of Spanish colonization. International religious congregations ushered locals, particularly the indigenous populations, to growth and development by establishing many academies and universities near or at the very heart of their cultural communities. This article looks into the educational experiences of three indigenous individuals under Catholic (CICM) schools in Northern Luzon and presents their narratives in light of their own understandings of local development, social impact, and sustainability. Based on their experiences, has CICM educational service upheld the dignity of their indigenous cultural identity or has it brought about cultural alienation for them? The study uses phenomenological portraiture as its methodology to make emerge the indigenous voices that can articulate a new story and understanding of human development, and surface indigenous perspectives toward an emancipatory education in accord with IP hopes for their optimal participation in authentic and realistic nation-building.

**Keywords:** Indigenization, Dignity, Self-Determination, Development Education, Indigenous Peoples

## INTRODUCTION

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Philippines came to witness its peoples' heroic movements for freedom and sovereignty. The 1896-98 revolution finally ended over three centuries of Spanish colonial rule. Spain relinquished its power over the Philippines and ceded the country to the United States of America. Spanish missionaries and friars were banished from churches and schools in the islands. Soon the nation saw an influx of American teachers, independent education, and non-Catholic missionaries evangelizing the archipelago. Whereas religious-oriented education during the Spanish period was exclusively for the elite,<sup>1</sup> the US colonial state, in reverse fashion, made secularized education readily accessible and free for the local populace.

These conditions greatly alarmed Catholic Church authorities in Rome. And the American Catholic bishops in the country urgently appealed to foreign missionary groups to send zealous priests to the Philippines or risk losing the faithful to the "enemies of the Church," i.e. the Freemasons and Protestants who opposed the Spanish friars (Depre 1992; Verhelst and Pycke 1995; Vanhoutte 2017).

The Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM; *Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariæ* in Latin) was among the religious orders that responded to the exigent demand. From the outset, its missionaries resolved to cover literacy as part of their work of evangelization. These missionaries were convinced that education was key to evangelization, firm in their belief that it could liberate people from spiritual and material poverty. Through education, people could unlearn ways that kept them miserable and learn ways to improve their conditions (Medina 2004).

Within eighty-six years (1907-1993) of CICM's presence in the Philippines, the missionaries founded and administered close to one hundred and sixty (160) mission and parochial schools, generally located throughout the Montañosa region and the Cagayan Valley.<sup>2</sup> Most of these schools had already been handed over to the various dioceses and vicariates to date, and are currently under the supervision of the local bishops.

Over the years and generations, these missionaries have ascertained natural patterns of development through the pathways of CICM education which emerged as pivotal determinants of social and cultural transformation in their mission fields.

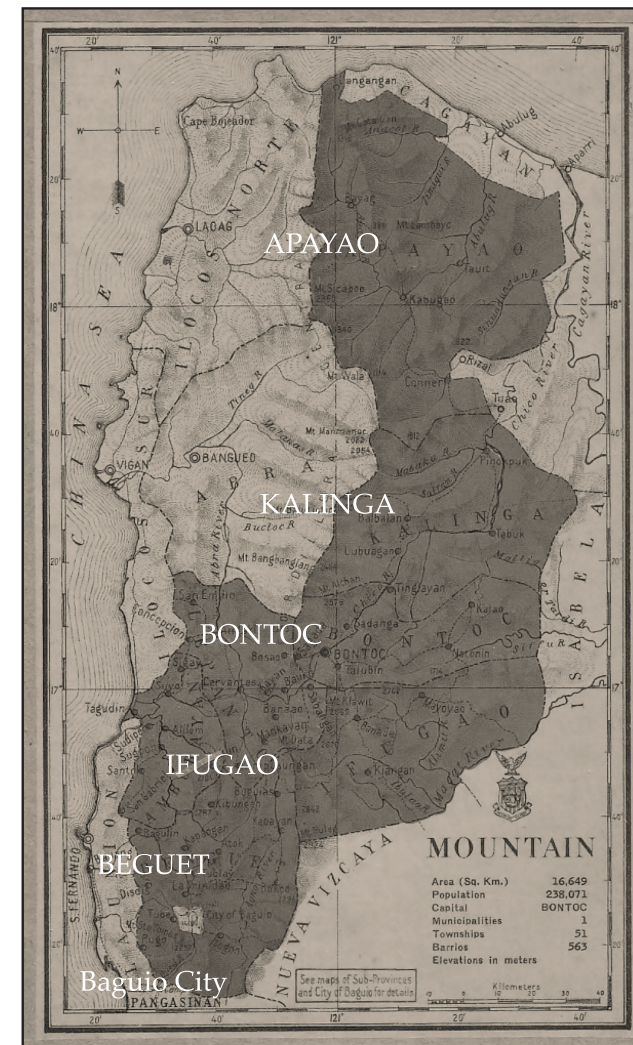


Figure 1: Map of Montañosa, 1918

[https://wikiwand.com/en/Mountain\\_Province](https://wikiwand.com/en/Mountain_Province).

The Immaculate Heart of Mary missionaries saw the “standard” competencies of education as the end goals for facilitating the assimilation of indigenous learners into the prevailing economic and political cultures of society. Delivery of standardized education proved to be the key to the social mainstreaming and integration of its recipients. Indigenous graduates of mainstream education began to be regarded as success stories, especially as they managed to find their way into the dominant non-indigenous social order and function as productive citizens in it. This model of “success,” however, registers an evident shift from the IPs’ fundamental perception of the “good life” (which, among them, is intimately associated with well-being and bountiful agricultural harvests) to one characterized by the comforts of urbanized living, technological advances, and the democratic access to modern education (Rovillos 2002).

Yet despite their apparent integration into mainstream cultures, IPs, particularly their women, children, young people, and persons with disabilities, still continue to struggle against discrimination and marginalization (Aboubakrine, Dhamai & Tauli-Corpuz 2017; Frank 2017). As a United Nations (UN) official statement released on the International Day of Indigenous Peoples in 2017 acknowledges: “Indigenous Peoples suffer from racism, discrimination and unequal access to basic services including healthcare and education” (UN Official Statement on International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples 2017).

### Objectives, Theories, and Methods

In this study, three indigenous co-researchers from CICM universities and colleges share their personal accounts of education experience through dialogic interactions and prolonged personal encounters with this researcher. Individual interviews and non-formal conversations were conducted with them at their respective localities and workplaces over a sustained period for this researcher to be able to hear their voices and elicit their life-narratives.

The research sought to look at the lived experiences of three indigenous individuals who closely encountered and experienced CICM education from their childhood days to their professional lives. Focusing on each one’s experience of westernized education delivered through the missionary schools and its formative impact on his or her life, this study did not intend to investigate or evaluate the educational system, curricular content, or education delivery itself. The main concern was to document each individual’s encounters with missionary education, as recounted from their indigenous standpoints.

Engaging in a *Phenomenological Portraiture* approach, the researcher not only keenly listened to the informants’ stories and

voices but also analyzed the emerging eidetic themes from the co-researchers’ (oral and transcribed) narratives, and gainfully learned from their insights on education relevant to indigenous understandings of development. Written literature by local authors on the educational activities of Catholic missionaries in northern Luzon and their impact on the lives of indigenous populations is rather limited. Kibiten (2018) observes that mission narratives and stories (including educational and pastoral accounts) were acknowledged and documented mainly from foreign missionaries’ perspectives.<sup>3</sup>

Indigenous Standpoint Theory orients this study, as it concerns the formation of human knowledge from a particular position. This viewpoint is constructed from the personal and collective experiences of individuals who form part of a marginal group, or a population subjugated by powerful social and/or political structures. Indigenous Standpoint Theory approaches knowledge acquisition and any understanding of it from the social epistemology and political perspectives of IPs. Wylie (2003) maintains that individuals or subjects who are in some disadvantaged position are somehow privileged by it to know what they know through their experiences, truthfully acquiring their knowledges and understandings of reality in this way.

Phenomenological Portraiture is a qualitative research method designed to discover and understand the images and essence of human experiences from verbal articulations and depictions of them. As an approach, it takes on the complexity of human experience and develops portrayals of them using words or textual illustrations which carefully generate images – familiar yet new, singular and collective at the same time. Portraiture is not about seeing one’s own reflection in the mirror. While the images may be very identifiable, they are also distinct, in retrospect, because the figures represented are deeply interpretive and may involve layered translations of their subjects. These illustrated textual portraits are structured with specificity, and while familiar, they may not exactly resemble the IP co-researchers who are its subjects since the resulting portraits may also project a kind of timelessness or typicality to them.

The Co-Researchers were selected according to their rich experiences, educational backgrounds, and their ability to contribute significantly to the inquiry. All three belong to ethnic communities within the Cordillera and the Cagayan regions where CICM missionaries established educational institutions. All commonly acquired their basic education from CICM-established schools. Their university and graduate degrees were completed at CICM universities and colleges. These Indigenous Co-Researchers had also been employed for a minimum of ten years at CICM institutions of learning in Northern Luzon.<sup>4</sup>

The three indigenous individuals in this research are identified and honored as co-researchers, and not mere participants or key-informants, as they actively engaged in the systematic investigation, with their storytelling and participatory discussions, toward the study's intended outputs of phenomenological portraits. Simply put: without them, no study, no stories. For emerging themes, factual evidence from the policies, practices, and planning of the institutions concerned were triangulated with observational records/notes and the work of interpretation. Dialogues with key institutional administrators were also conducted to validate the study's observations.

From the raw narratives, I was able to recompose their personal accounts, hopefully evocative of the dissonant refrains, articulated nuances, complex shadows, and detailed intricacies arising from their autobiographically recollected life-experiences. Again, hopefully, the portraits exceeded mere incidental constructions of descriptive texts. Needless to say, the main researcher, in Portraiture, interprets the portrait's subject through the active search for coherence in what is observed and discovered about him or her in the course of research (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997). As the stories from their singular standpoints unfolded, the portraits which emerged both captured the familiar and the uniquely evolutionary and essential in the arcs of their personal development. In putting together these verbal pictures, the essential features of Portraiture were taken into account and deployed, e.g. the context clues and voice expressions. Recurrent refrains and metaphors helped crystallize the emerging themes. Through cross-panel analysis, scrutiny of the relevant elements yielded narratives, rituals, and symbols across the individual portraits. From these processes and results, the study hopes to have hewn a collective aesthetic whole out of these three portraits, that is, with a unity and cohesion greater than the sum of its constitutive parts.

**Portraits: IP Experiences of CICM Education**

**THELMA**

Thelma began her story with a telling detail: although her family hails from Mayoyao, Ifugao, she was born 1979 in Baguio City, and grew up in Tuguegarao, Cagayan. Thelma's father was employed in one of the mission schools in Baguio for many years; then her family moved to Cagayan where they lived in special quarters on the University of Saint Louis (USL) campus. Past halfway through her basic education period (1985-1995), the 1973 national curriculum for basic education was replaced by the New Secondary Education Curriculum (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** The New Secondary Education Curriculum was implemented in 1992/93, with the major subject areas being science, mathematics, technology, Filipino, English and civics/national culture (www.ibe.unesco.org 2006).

Subject	Weekly Time Alloted to Each Subject (in minutes)			
	I	II	III	IV
English Language	200	200	200	200
Filipino Language	200	200	200	200
Science and Technology	400	400	400	400
Mathematics	200	200	200	200
Social Studies	200	200	200	200
Physical Education, Health and Music	200	200	200	200
Values Education	200	200	200	200
Technology and Home Economics	400	400	400	400
<b>Total weekly minutes</b>	2000	2000	2000	2000
<b>Total minutes per day</b>	400	400	400	400
<b>Total hours per day</b>	6hrs40m	6hrs40m	6hrs40m	6hrs40m

Thelma recalls that, as a child, she used to speak several languages. She communicated with her playmates, who were from other parts of the country, in Tagalog, Ilocano, English, and the region's local languages. For some time, she also stayed with her grandparents in Mayoyao; there she learned more about her culture and her parents' native tongue, Mayoyao.

An intellectually gifted person, she currently works, in a key position, for an Education office of the government. For her schooling, she received a full scholarship after passing a qualifying exam in high school for it. Thelma admits that without this scholarship, her family would have found it very difficult to send her to school. Her parents, though hardworking, were poor.

Instruction at USL was mainly conducted in English and, in some subjects, Filipino.<sup>5</sup> Thelma vividly remembers that someone in class had to list down the names of students who spoke in the vernacular and to note the frequencies with which they did it. As children, she and her classmates would speak in Itawis each time they felt the need to be more securely intimate in class and among themselves; she also communicated in Ibanag with others on campus. Playtime and socialization were occasions to use their indigenous languages. Classroom learning was only in English and, at times, Filipino.



Thelma shares, openly, the cultural ambivalence surrounding her identity while growing up. Although cognizant of her Ifugao roots, she struggled internally with the exposure to the other dominant cultures in school and in the community. As a student, she experienced being confronted by others, several times, about her identity. As she narrates: "That was one of the questions I had to deal with... 'Where do I belong?'" Although from Ifugao, she could profess to know more about the local culture, based on her experiences, than her ancestral one.

While a student, she did participate in cultural shows but likewise ended up demonstrating for it more knowledge about the local mix of cultures rather than of her own Ifugao heritage. For Thelma, it was the family and the home which served as the epicenters of Ifugao cultural practices and rituals. She always respected her father's beliefs and observed them religiously, for example. But elsewhere, like at her classmates' houses, say, she would find herself immediately adjusting to their practices and mores. Such 'inconsistencies' somehow created conflicts within her, Thelma admits. Even to date, the questions about where she belongs and her "identity" remain for her.

Thelma spent all her study years with the missionaries. Her basic and college education were completed at USL, and so were her graduate degrees: master's at USL and doctorate at Saint Mary's University (SMU). CICM education has therefore thoroughly shaped her worldview and thinking. As a case in point, the logical reasoning and scientific knowledge she learned in school have raised troubling questions and ambiguities about native culture and practices for her.

That people have recourse to science and medicine when afflicted with disease, for example, contrasted with the quite different set-up in their family, as her paternal grandfather was a *mumfun* (native priest) and a healer. He would perform rituals for anyone who fell ill, offering prayers to the spirits on the community's behalf. Despite her extensive exposures in school to secular and scientific ideas, Thelma nonetheless abided by her family's precepts on this and related matters. That indigenous ways are regarded as mostly 'non-scientific,' and that rituals are presumably not logic-based, drove her to try to uncover explanations for the connections between these ritual practices and the curative effects experienced by the infirmed, even as these explanations remained elusive or were not easily forthcoming.

CICM education, according to Thelma, has helped her to take these distinct realities seriously, despite how discrepant or incompatible they seemed to be. She learned to desist from regarding one as better than the other. "They are different," she contends. Fortunately, both realities seem to be more manageable now, having gradually evolved to a relationship of complementarity as far as she is concerned. "When a person is sick, the person is brought to see a doctor; but after seeing a doctor still the *mumfun* comes to the house to butcher the chicken

and look at its liver until such a time he finds exactly what he desires to see."

This holds true as well for matters that concern the Christian faith and indigenous beliefs. Catholic weddings take place in churches but, before they do, a *funi* (native ritual) is performed by the *mumfun* for the couple. Thelma explains that these rituals are believed to be guided by the spirits who direct the *mumfun* and his benedictions; ritual incantations are learned through spiritual revelations that occur in their dreams. These are traditions passed on from one generation to the next and are not learned from books. Thelma recognizes the wisdom in these practices. Through rituals and divinations, the *mumfun* gets to know the best time for planting and the best time to harvest; by following nature's sounds and signs, the *mumfun* is able to divine the time and instances certain creatures would emerge from the earth and what these might signify or mean.

Thelma's academic training and studies taught her to respect both her indigenous roots and the sciences, both the Christian faith and Ifugao customary beliefs. Her encounters with the missionaries have encouraged her in the belief that their indigenous rituals and practices are neither savage nor malevolent:

"The Fathers never said anything about it. It is mostly the laypeople that would think that way and have such concepts. But with the Fathers, no. When we tried to argue with Father Desmet, he simply smiled."

She is strongly convinced that it would be difficult to resolve these matters with an exclusivist and absolutist frame of mind. A highly scientific and westernized disposition threatens peoples' indigeneity, and yet science and reason, she avers, may not also be totally rejected. She obviously prefers, with her words, to inhabit a middle ground, and be open to the dynamic relationship between the two distinct realities. While CICM education, for Thelma, only indirectly promoted indigenous cultures, what it did best was to foster an environment for local cultures to survive. Missionaries witnessed their indigenous beliefs and respected their practices. Indigenous wisdom, Thelma emphasizes, is vital to the growth and modernization of societies. "Local knowledge would be contributory in learning how to deal with the environment and the community." She opines that society today is at a loss on how to act and interact with nature and the environment. The concept of improvement that Thelma upholds is one that enhances peoples' quality of life. For her, although material and economic growth are necessary, cultural values are paramount.

Wishing for education frameworks to transcend the conventional structures acceptable to the majority of educators in the country, she

advocates strongly for contextualized content in curricular designs. The immediate environment should determine teaching and learning. She believes that in a model where content precedes the context, people end up searching for employment elsewhere, i.e. in places and environments that can accommodate whatever has been learned. "They improve that new place but what happens with their own community that was left behind? No improvement!"

The matter of IP self-determination is evident from Thelma's expertise and own interventions. For example, she is desirous for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to promote the appreciation of diversity while providing support for local knowledges, indigenous research, and values. For her, success happens when local people learn for their own communities; and when their talents/training are put in the service of such local communities themselves. The sense of a shared dignity for the community concerned happens when its members engage in these kinds of participatory actions.

#### ANDREW

Andrew, 50 years old, is originally from Kiangán in Ifugao and belongs to the Tuwali cultural community. The family migrated to Benguet where he attended primary and secondary school at Saint Louis High School there. After graduating from high school in 1987, he proceeded to Saint Louis University (SLU) in Baguio City for his college education and degree. He expresses pride in the loyalty award he received on graduation day, some decades ago, for completing all his studies at CICM schools. He went on to teach at Saint Louis College (SLC) in San Fernando, La Union, while pursuing (and eventually completing) his master's at the same institution.

School and church are the key institutions in the community where he grew up. English was the medium for academic learning; indeed, it was mandatory for students to use English and they could be penalized for speaking in local languages. Even in church and liturgical services, English was the privileged language for praying to God. Andrew recalls wondering, as a child: "Will God understand me if I prayed in my own language?"

While growing up, Andrew observed how favorably significant school and knowledge were for every Ifugao household, even as Andrew is hardly able to recall instances when basic education strengthened his cultural identity. One thing was clear though: education was the sure key to escape poverty; its goal and purpose were primarily economic. In college, classroom lectures were mainly technical, focused for the most part on subject area contents. There were no explicit activities that promoted indigenous culture and values in school, as apparently this was not the curriculum's priority

back then. Nonetheless, for Andrew, education had substantially provided him (and many others) life opportunities otherwise unavailable had he simply remained in their upland village. He found his living standards raised dramatically after successfully completing his studies. It was in the daily life and practices of the community where culture and identity were more emphasized and strengthened.

Andrew discloses that formal education presented him with plain and clear-cut distinctions, namely: (1) the customary practices observed by their indigenous community and (2) the myriad possibilities non-indigenous lifeways could offer beyond his local world. While CICM education did not explicitly restrict indigenous knowledge, neither did it nurture, in any way, their customary practices nor recognize ancestral wisdom. He believes that these realities (cultural practices and education) are not mutually exclusive. One simply had to learn to live with the distinctions and ambiguity; accept the ostensible "conflicts" and possible harmonies between them; and appreciate the richness, and value the unique synthesis they offer.

Andrew further describes:

"Just to give an example, when my father died. The day we had to put his body in the coffin, we butchered one pig. The *mumbaki* (native priest) performed the native ritual for two hours; it was very long. Prayers and chants were offered including indigenous symbols – native chicken, another pig, lime, etc. However soon after lunch, we had the (Catholic) prayer service. Prayers were conducted in English and there were guitars and singing; that part is CICM (education). On the fifth day during the burial, the prayer service was in English. But after lunch in the afternoon, it was the *mumbaki* that presided again. There were solemn gongs, very solemn. They took out the body from the coffin and placed it in the tomb sideways. Then there were prayers once more. Here you see that people adopted the CICM religious (rites) but retained their cultural practices. There is this combination."

Here, distinction and ambiguity are coexisting realities which one simply needed to welcome and respect. This seems ironic when viewed from a non-indigenous perspective because people are expected to embrace one practice and abandon the other, but for Andrew, both were accepted and deemed complementary.

Andrew is convinced that the indispensable features and elements of local culture must inform any national education framework. Directly engaged in the academe for many years now, Andrew ardently believes in an educational system that must be closer to people's homes and hearts than they are: an instruction considerate of

Indigenous Peoples and their worldviews/ concerns; and a process of learning that develops from their original belief systems and lifeways, as contrasted with sheer learning of interpreted indigenous content portrayed with non-indigenous representations.

To him, it is imperative for the system of education in the country to work out organically from the process of localization or Filipinization. He is firm in the conviction that cultural values be restored as the rudimentary bases for viable sustainability and development, for IPs value relationship: "We value our relationship with nature and environment, particularly the intimate association with our ancestral lands."

Education may have steered him toward certain pinnacles of professional success yet it could never replace the value of self-understanding instilled in him by his local community. Andrew punctuated his interview responses with the refrain that he is and will always be an Ifugao. In his parting words: "I still remember what the elders always told us: 'Do not forget where you came from, stay humble and share'." It is a compelling message which he eloquently articulates, not only in word and speech, but also through his actions on the level of the everyday.

**SHERILYN**

Sherilyn was born in 1971 and was raised at a mining camp. She attended Saint Louis High School-Philex Mines in Tuba, Benguet for her basic education in the years 1977-1987. It was during her high school study years that the Education Department implemented the Revised Secondary Education Curriculum (1973-1988) as the national education framework (see Table 5: RSEC conceptual matrices implemented in CICM schools).

Her father worked as an underground miner at Philex for many years. The family is originally from Lias, Barlig (Mt. Province) and belongs to the Ilias tribe. At home they speak Ilias, a dialect of the Balangao language. She knows Ilocano well and can also speak Kankanaey, some Ibaloi, and a little Pangasinense. Exposure to these different languages came from growing up at the mining camp. Occasionally, Sherilyn also used Tagalog, particularly at the Main Camp housing the Tagalog-speaking employees. Like at all other schools founded by the missionaries, instruction at the mining camp school was mainly conducted in English and Filipino. She only spoke Ilias on campus when with siblings or other students whose parents are from Barlig.

**Table 2.** The Revised Secondary Education Curriculum (1973-1988) implemented in CICM schools (eduphil.org).

YEAR LEVEL	ENGLISH	SCIENCE	MATH	FILIPINO	ARALIN PANLIPUNAN
I	<b>Philippine Literature</b>  Narrative Drama Poetry Essay	<b>Integrated Science</b>  Scientific Method Sun-Moon-Earth System States of Matter Nature of Force Motion Transfer of Energy Changes on Earth Relationships between Living and Nonliving Things	Real Number System Measurement, Scientific Notation Algebraic Expressions Special Products and Factoring Rational Algebraic Expressions First Degree Equations and Inequalities in One Variable Linear Equations and Inequalities in Two Variables	<b>Akdang Pampanitlikang Rehiyunal</b>  Kasanayang Pampanitlikan at Komunikatibo <b>Parabula Alamat Epiko Ibong Adarna (Korido)</b>	Kasaysayan at Pamahalaan ng Pilipinas  Heyograpiya at mga Kabihasang Pilipino Pagkakailanlang Pilipino Kalayaan Pamahalaan at Mamamayan
II	<b>Afro-Asian Literature</b>  Narrative Drama Poetry Essay	<b>Biology</b>  The Cell Life Energy Structure and Life Functions of Organisms Reproduction Genetics Evolution Biodiversity	Systems of Linear Equations and Inequalities in Two Variables Quadratic Equations Rational Equations Rational Exponents Radical Expressions and Equations Variation Sequence and Series	<b>Akdang Pampanitlikang Pambansa</b>  Kasanayang Pampanitlikan at Komunikatibo <b>Tula Balagasan Dula (Pantanghalan) Awit (Florante at Laura)</b>	<b>Pag-aaral ng mga Bansang Asyano</b>  Heyograpiya at mga Kabihasang Asyano Pagkakailanlang Asyano Transpormasyon ng Asya Pamahalaan, Kultura at Lipunang Asyano
III	<b>Philippine and British-American Literature</b>  Narrative Drama Poetry Essay	<b>Chemistry</b>  Chemical Systems Composition of the Atom Elements in Periodic Table Chemical Bonds Chemical Reactions Behavioral Gasses Solutions Colloids	Geometry of Shapes and Sizes Geometric Relations Writing Proofs Perpendicular Lines, Parallel Lines Triangle Congruence Inequalities in a Triangle Similarity Circles Plane Coordinate Geometry	<b>Saling-akdang Pampanitlikang Asyano</b>  Kasanayang Pampanitlikan at Komunikatibo <b>Dula (Pantelebisyon / Pampelikula) Maiting Kwento Nobela Noli Me Tangere</b>	Kasaysayan ng Daigdig  Heyograpiya at mga Kabihasang Pandaigdig Pag-usbong ng Pandaigdigang Kamalayan Pag-unlad ng Kaisipan Tungo sa Transpormasyon Pandaigdigang Pagkakaisa
IV	<b>World Literature</b>  Narrative Drama Poetry Essay	<b>Physics</b>  Newtonian Mechanics Electromagnetism Electronics Wave Motion Acoustics Optics Thermodynamics Nuclear Energy	Functions Linear Functions Quadratic Functions Polynomial Functions Exponential, Logarithmic Function Circular Functions Trigonometric Functions Counting Techniques, Probability Collection and Organization of Data Measures of Central Tendency Variability	<b>Saling-akdang Pampanitlikang Pandaigdig</b>  Kasanayang Pampanitlikan at Komunikatibo <b>Parabula Mitolohiyong Sanaysay (nobela) El Filibusterismo</b>	<b>Ekonomiks</b>  Pinagkukunang Yaman at Kaularang Pangkabuhayan Too at Suliranin ng Kakapusan Pang-ekonomiya Pamamahala Globalisasyon at mga Isyung Pangkabuhayan

As Sherilyn recalls, the school and the church functioned as the main institutions of the community, with each playing important roles in the socio-political and cultural life of the residents. She has personal difficulties remembering activities in school that overtly promoted

the cultural identities of students. There were native songs and cultural dances repeatedly performed when special guests visited on rare occasions, which were exceptions to the typical school activities such as sports competitions and the intramural showcase of talents. Otherwise much of the school and classroom activities centered on academic learning.

Were she to go back and teach children in the elementary grades there, Sherilyn, in candor, expressed the desire to promote a particularly critical standpoint among them: "It is OK to be Igorot. It is OK if your name does not sound nice for everybody. It is alright to be who you are, to speak your own language and express your indigenous thoughts and aspirations." For her, the emphasis nowadays should be placed on consciousness-raising among students, for them to develop pride in their origins. And since language is a significant element in shaping a people's cultural orientation, she believes that indigenous communities should first value and show appreciation of their own languages over others. Her early education experiences, in terms of native language appreciation, were sadly the reverse: "We were not given the chance to showcase that part of our culture, to speak the language that represents who you are in the classroom."

Sherilyn takes great pride these days in her native name Sinib-atan, which means 'a place to meet,' or 'a meeting place.' At home, her mother hails her with this name, as do other Lias-origin people at the camp. It makes her happy whenever other people acknowledge her as Sinib-atan. Among the Ilias tribe, a special ritual for the naming of children involves the family's elders (grandparents) who recommend the name/s for the children. During this ritual, the family's ancestors (spirits) confirm the suggested name/s and, in turn, implored to keep them safe from harm.

In all her classes, Sherilyn encourages her students to feel comfortable and dignified with their identity. She admits that in her youth, many students, herself included, expressed embarrassment about their cultural roots and heritage. A sense of groundless insecurity, a kind of "people-shouldn't-notice-I-am-an-Igorot" sensitivity, got surreptitiously fostered among her cohort. As she puts it, "We were mainstreamed in school from elementary to college. We [had] to learn about our own culture through subjects in Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies), Sibika (Civics), and History." She remembers that in such subjects, she and her generation were made to accept problematic descriptions of indigenous peoples. Given that most of her teachers were lowlanders (although some were from Ifugao and Benguet), "I don't recall any instance of cultural appreciation like: this is your language, this is where you come from, this is your tribe – come let's talk about it; no discussion, no activities that will make me talk about me and where I come from."

It was not until Sherilyn was in college at SLU that she gradually appreciated her cultural identity: "Igorotak! (I am Igorot!)" It was in deciding to major in Education, with the resolve to become an educator herself thereafter, that she experienced personal growth and transformation. Sherilyn felt fortunate to have college teachers who encouraged her to articulate who she is and her personal aspirations. As she puts it, these teachers and other personnel of the school "paved the way for me to be just exactly who I am; to speak my own language and be free to express my thoughts and aspirations as an IP [indigenous person]." There was nothing similar in her graduate studies, however; at that level, curricular infrastructure and course content remained pivoted on mainstream education.

In all, the missionary character of the institution, and the values by which people in the university abided, constituted the enabling environment for her self-affirmation as an IP professional and educator. "Probably, I would not have been able to show more about myself had I been in another school. I have learned so much about life and myself because of this institution."

Sherilyn likened this education, under missionary superintendence, to a journey of personal translations: between the scientific and the cultural, the academy and the community. Her definition of education now encompasses both school and community:

"It was more than what I have learned in the classroom because classes were very academic and topic-centered. So this was something very personal to me and was not solely about what I learned academically. I crafted my own interpretations according to my experiences. I realized there is something that needs to be done, and that could be done; so I poured out everything I learned and figured its translations in my life. It was not because someone dictated on me what I needed to do."

As an indigenous educator, Sherilyn advocates a community-based learning experience. For her, it is crucial for teachers, as facilitators, to optimize the cultural wealth – the customs, rituals, practices, and traditions – possessed by the communities: "These realities are most familiar to children and students because this is their milieu." She hopes that "the academe could welcome and help people understand their own identity so that every individual coming from indigenous tribes may feel important and feel that their practices matter."



## CONCLUSION: A COLLECTIVE PORTRAIT

In exploring the lived experiences of three indigenous adults and the place of CICM education in their lives, this study sought to draw up their individual portraits with their close collaboration. Their narrative testimonies, interspersed with interpretive representations so as to make their settings more perceptible, yielded plots and patterns (or themes and meanings) which are analyzed and organized from the perspective of development, impact, and sustainability in this concluding section: the matter of language and learning, on the one hand; and the matter of missionary 'neutrality' and informal education, on the other. Both sets of issues are reckoned in terms of our co-researchers' quests to clarify their relationships to, and personal investments in, their cultural identities and heritage.

All three co-researchers Thelma, Andrew, and Sherilyn have critical points to make about English as the normative language for academic learning in CICM schools (and in Philippine education, more generally). As children, they were trained to accept that English was universal and natural even as they experienced unexplainable interior rumblings about this language situation too persistent to be ignored. Sherilyn vividly remembers how liberated she felt when she finally had the opportunity in college to express herself, and to share her aspirations as a Cordillera native, using her own language. She had always desired to do so since childhood. Andrew longed to use his native language to communicate and develop intimacy with God but fear deterred him, on the understanding that God only comprehended petitions expressed in English.

While education and competency in English provided them broader possibilities to break out of their immediate contexts, this ubiquitous language also came with the unspoken assumption that fundamental concepts, principal theories, and acceptable worldviews are those associated with and communicable in it (Tripura 2018). Native perceptions, notions, and articulations expressed in indigenous languages were, as a consequence, devalued, if not denigrated.

As with most schools in the country, missionary education delivery leaves much to be desired when it came to the promotion of local languages, culture, and literature. Indigenous students are taught to recognize T.S. Eliot, Edgar Allan Poe, or William Shakespeare better than their own literary heritage, e.g. the Ifugao Alim and Hudhud (Enkiwe-Abayao 2002; 2003).

Yet such an experience in the classroom generates an intensified passion and intentionality among indigenous students to articulate their cultural identity with the right to a culture-appropriate education. It is ironically the experience of epistemic violence which compels Sherilyn, Andrew, and Thelma to refunction the westernized

education they received by envisioning instructional and learning approaches pivoted on indigenous wisdom and knowledges. Rigney (2001) refers to this process as the 'journey of academic contradiction.' The term suggests the use of the same colonial education one has received to increase peoples' awareness of Western domination and the pressing need for intellectual emancipation and independence. This contradiction empowers Indigenous Peoples to search for solutions and develop their own theoretical positions, in pursuit of their epistemic and intellectual agency. As Nakata (2007) exhorts: "in order to understand our own position and to ultimately act to improve it, we must first immerse ourselves in and understand the very systems of thought, ideas and knowledge that have been instrumental in producing our position."

All three co-researchers recognize the significance of missionary personalities closely associated with their CICM education, and that school and church were the key and formative institutions in their communities. In most cases, the school administrator and parish pastor were simply one and the same missionary, creating a unique learning space for students to verify classroom knowledge and their daily life practices vis-à-vis these tutelary figures. Close pastoral encounters with missionaries in the communities functioned as laboratories for experimenting with whatever it was that the scholastic curriculum had "demystified" for them. Academic sciences have discredited healing practices of native priests on nonmedical and unhygienic grounds, for instance; catechetical classes challenged 'atang' practices and discouraged other 'pagan' rituals.<sup>6</sup> However, all co-researchers observed that, in conducting regular home visitations, missionaries would witness the indigenous religious practices at work in students and employees' households, e.g. when a community member dies, and the pertinent native rituals are performed, attended, and participated in by the bereaved's relatives and friends.

The missionaries apparently tended to maintain neutrality on these matters. As the three co-researchers observed, it was generally the lay people who proved to be the staunch guardians of the Christian faith and defenders of science, in their experience; as for the missionary educators, they simply ignored these practices and proceeded with their daily roles and tasks in the community and the school. Thelma, Andrew, and Sherilyn recall that the missionaries were neither indifferent nor affirmative about the people's practices. While the missionaries were steadfast in their convictions and faith, they never demonstrated hostility against indigenous cultures and, on the contrary, sought to befriend people in the communities, especially the elders and the native religious leaders.

In real-life and culture situations that went beyond classroom discussions and rhetoric, the very people closely affiliated with

systematic and westernized learning in school continued to uphold, to a certain degree, their tribal heritage and values in the face of contrasting perspectives, while the missionaries, as the bearers of CICM education, preferred to be cautious in their community engagements and maintained ambivalent silence on these matters. Such a stance on the part of the missionaries paradoxically encouraged the communal safeguarding and conservation of indigenous and customary practices.

Throughout the many years of education service delivery to the indigenous communities of the north, the absence of a dialectical framework that addresses the creative dynamics of indigenous culture and modern knowledge-production remained a challenge, a situation generally left unrecognized. Approaches alternative to the mainstream and westernized system of education continue to be unsupported.

Andrew's term for this educational challenge is *localization*. Sherilyn identifies it as *indigenization*, and Thelma acknowledges the urgency for *contextualization*. They might label an identical thought differently, but the situation plainly indicates that throughout their study years, CICM institutions of learning maintained programs, structures, and strategies not adequately representational of indigenous values, culture, and interests. More or less, the system has consigned whatever is indigenous (knowledge, traditions, and practices) to the peripheries, at the risk of them being devalued or, worse, forgotten.

The failure of CICM education to address the problem all these years, despite the congregation's Indigenous Peoples priority claim,<sup>7</sup> provides an expansive opening for the IP educators to seriously explore the possibilities of a system able to account for the cultural communities' memory, narratives, arts, spirituality, and socio-political, economic, and environmental practices.

All three co-researchers agree on education as the key to a better life for members of indigenous communities. We have seen through our portraiture here how gradually, through their academic accomplishments, the three co-researchers gained meaningful employment, allowing them to enjoy creature comforts and modern-day conveniences. Education, undeniably, has also equipped them with global competencies and skills, which gave them social mobility, an escape from the traditional environment which may be considered as both an intellectual and an actual migration to a greater global community. To Sherilyn, Thelma, and Andrew, this education, within the colonial framework adapted by the Dept. of Education, had made of them conformists of a kind who abide by ideals foreign to them and not their own.

Nonetheless, this project's co-researchers, during their study years, have strongly come to associate development with the quest

for transformation, as opportunities for growth provided by CICM education brought about positive changes in their lives. They enjoyed tangible changes in terms of economic, environmental, and health concerns, and intangible changes relating to their cultural identity, ritual practices, worship, and beliefs. For them, these changes counted as further advancement, in the ways these co-researchers knew best, which is to keep to their indigenous heritage while in pursuit of erudite learning imparted to them by missionary education.

From our portrayal process here, there emerges a common call from and for the three co-researchers to return to their origins; or to the sources of wisdom, a kind of cultural homeground. It is a process of returning best describable through their own terms: localization, indigenization, and contextualization. This "homecoming" guarantees them the bond of reconnection necessary to ensure sustainable relationships within their communities and clans, with non-indigenous colleagues and other peoples, with nature and the environment, with all of creation, and ultimately, with the divine. In this light, the primary challenge for CICM learning institutions today consists in listening to indigenous voices like those of our co-researchers, which clamor for self-determination and their active participation in the management of the institutional affairs of schools concerned with the education of IPs. CICM schools must also reevaluate their responses to the urgent calls for education reform which considers the social and cultural contexts of the indigenous communities they profess to serve. Barriers that restrain IPs from engaging in educational leadership ought to be broken down so as to foster an enabling environment for upholding the aspirations and visions of indigenous peoples.

The recommendation to Filipinize (localize), contextualize, or to indigenize education desires the intellectual autonomy necessary to provide original designs and structures integrating the political, social, and spiritual lives of cultural communities, in the instruction and learning of indigenous learners (Rigney 2001). It is a re-turning to, and a re-education in, one's cultural rootedness, finding value in the bounteous resources bequeathed to the communities by their ancestors, such as their rituals, practices, wisdom, and local knowledges.

## NOTES

1. Under Spain, public access to education among local Filipinos was liberalized only in 1863 through a Spanish Education Decree that mandated municipal governments of each town to provide at least one primary school for school children.
2. The ecclesiastical territory of the Apostolic Prelature of Montaña consisted of 5 provinces and a chartered city: Benguet, Ifugao, Bontoc, Apayao, Kalinga and Baguio City. Missionaries also

founded many schools in the Cagayan Valley region (Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela, Quirino, and Cagayan).

3. *Little Apostle of the Mountain Province* was a magazine regularly published by the CICM missionaries documenting educational and pastoral works. It has been renamed since as *The Apostle of the Mountain Province*.
4. Data were gathered through the co-researchers' oral and written narratives, responses to my formal interviews, and informal encounters with them. Resulting audio files were transcribed and listened to on at least four different occasions to verify different voicings and varying perspectives, and thus ensure accuracy and precision of the textual transcriptions. The interviews and conversations took place over a period of five months (July-November 2019), at their respective workplaces.
5. The Philippine Bilingual Education Policy (DO 25, s.1974) was issued by the Department of Education in 1974. Thirteen years later, the Aquino government confirmed the previous directive with a new Policy on Bilingual Education (DO 52, s.1987) issued on 12 May 1987.
6. Atang is a native practice of symbolic offering (food and drink) for the dead or the 'unseen' spirits. For example, when a jar of new rice wine is served on certain occasions, the first few drops are offered to the spirits, accompanied with fervent prayer.
7. See CICM Provincial Missionary Project 2016-2021.

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